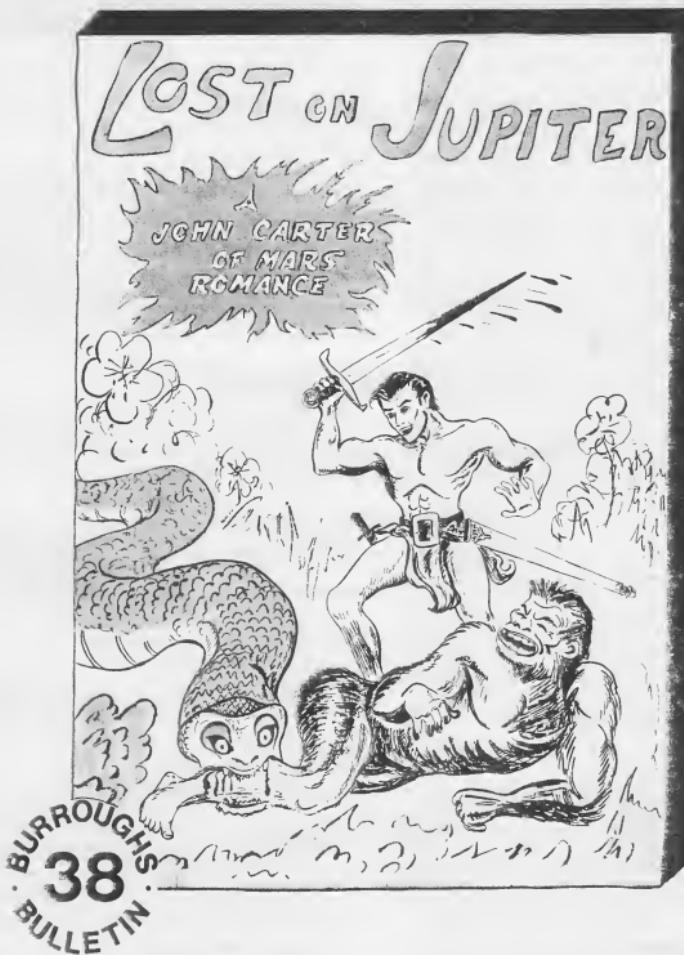


The Amazing Sequel To:

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS'

SKELETON MEN OF JUPITER





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LOST ON JUPITER

by

WILLIAM GILMOUR

BEING THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF THE FAMED
WARLORD OF BARSOOM ON THE PLANET JUPITER

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COVER — LENREV LEIROC

2 — J. ALLEN ST. JOHN

BACK COVER — WILLIAM GILMOUR

VERNELL CORIELL editor, publisher
STANLEIGH B. VINSON associate publisher

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THE ORIGINAL AND ONLY AUTHORIZED EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS FANZINE

"I STILL LIVE"—Edgar Rice Burroughs

PROLOGUE

I had just finished reading—for perhaps the tenth time—the last of the highly publicized accounts which narrate the astounding adventures of the renowned John Carter, Warlord of Mars. Inasmuch as I already knew that this narrative was merely the opening chapters of a contemporary long novel, I have often found myself lost deep in thought pondering as to how and where this noteworthy tale was brought to a final conclusion.

Those of you who have had the opportunity of reading the incredible account of the erstwhile visit of Edgar Rice Burroughs and of my subsequent journey to that magnificent chamber of wonders to become an honored guest among the nobles attending the stately banquet, will recall that the Warlord spoke of the further adventures he had had upon the giant, cloud-enshrouded planet of Jupiter and that the story was by no means at an end with the publication of "Skeleton Men of Jupiter".

How very often I have visualized this remarkable personage as he relentlessly pursued his quest in the manner we know so well, across the face of that enormous world nearly three hundred and fifty millions of miles from his beloved Bersoon! How often I have seen him, with naked sword in hand, as he fought through numerous obstacles encountered there! What really had befallen this man since the time he had landed on the outskirts of the village, presumably that of his friend Zan Dar, until I had seen him seated in the banquet hall among the greatest gathering of dignitaries capable of being conceived in the mind of man?

With a distressing gesture, I laid the magazine aside, leaned back in my chair and, with half-closed eyes, I again went through the same exasperating ordeal which has been my wont on countless other occasions.

I was becoming obsessed with my failure to form a reasonable solution as to why the Warlord had refused to allow the balance of this wonderful epic from becoming public, when I was cognizant of an unintelligible entity disturbing the sequence of my thoughts. Shaking my head in vexation, I arose and strode to the window, threw it open and sucked in great lungfuls of the crisp night air. What was this unidentified will-o'-the-wisp which had so suddenly interrupted my chain of thoughts and persisted with intimate piquancy? A slight movement from behind caused me to whirl from the window and there before my eyes stood the subject of the incessant conflict which had smoldered within me for many a day—John Carter, Warlord of Mars!

He stood with wide-spread legs, a grim smile playing on the corners of his lips, and fully trepped in the richly colored regalia significant of his high office on the world of his adoption—a splendid figure of a man.

"John Carter!" I exclaimed. "Can it be possible that you have perceived the fitful restlessness of my mind? Have you at last come to relieve the state of anxiety which has besieged me since I last saw you?"

"Yes," replied the Warlord, stepping forward and taking my proffered hand in both of his. "Since it was by my admission that you became aware of the further happenings to myself upon Jupiter, I can now see no reason why they shouldn't be told."

"But why," I asked, "why is it that Mr. Burroughs did not record and publish these happenings during his lifetime?"

"For the simple reason that he had no knowledge of them," replied my visitor. "Immediately I had completed transmitting the opening chapters which have long since appeared in print, I was summoned from Helium to act as arbitrator in a dispute that had quite unexpectedly arisen between the Empires of Ptarth and Kaol. This dispute developed into a succession of events which saw me absent from Helium for a number of years of

Earthly time. There is no need for further explanation as it is self-explanatory."

At my request, the great Warlord seated himself comfortably upon the sofa and promptly began the narrative which I am about to re-tell as nearly in his own words as my faulty memory can recall them, notwithstanding the fact that it reeks of poor literary quality—an impotence which was non-existent in my illustrious and greatly talented predecessor.

FOREWORD

The vast distance between the planets Mars and Jupiter is something approximating three hundred and forty-two millions of miles—give or take a few million, and, like most of you, I have often found myself gazing at the bright, belted disk hanging in the southern sky which we of Mars know as Sesoom. And also, like most of you, I had never imagined, even in the wildest of dreams, that I would cross this enormous expanse which separated two worlds—but I did cross.

In a story already told, you saw how, through a ruse, I was overpowered by the human-like skeletons of Jupiter known as Morgors, and subsequently transported to the great planet. These Morgors, who had virtually conquered the entire surface of their home planet, had carried their lust for power to my beloved Bersoon as a step in their plans which may have included the ultimate subjugation of the solar system itself. They had discovered the secret of space travel, and, most importantly, had achieved a method by which they could render their ships invisible, which could well be the determining factor in the success of their infamous plot.

They enlisted the aid of a degenerate Barsacolian prince named Multis Far, and, from him, the Morgors learned that if they were to attain a quick triumph in the conquest of Mars, they must take me prisoner, who, as Warlord, am well informed with data relative to the disposition of the armament and air fleets of the various nations.

Multis Far couldn't have known much concerning my traits of character for I would have died a thousand deaths before disclosing a single shred of information helpful to their motives. Nor did I speak when they confronted me with an added inducement of loosening the tongue—the consequent capture of Dejah Thoris, my incomparable mate! Both of us preferred torture and death rather than perfidy.

However, with the aid of others, I managed to escape, procure a ship and release Dejah Thoris from her prison. In the company of U Den, Vaja, his betrothed, Zan Dar and a Morgor pilot, I saw her safely away to the island of Zanor, but the Morgors re-captured me before I could enter the ship. Zanor was the country of my Savior friend, Zan Dar, who had promised us asylum were we ever to reach it. The Savators, as you know, are what all mankind of Jupiter call themselves.

What further befell me was experienced light-heartedly as I had every reason to believe that my mate, the Princess of Helium, was in safe hands.

At last, I again escaped from the Morgors, and the shaping of events formed in such a manner that I was able to seize a ship. After rendering it invisible, I flew out upon the vast ocean which separated me from the country of Zanor and Dejah Thoris. And such an ocean! Storms of indescribable fury beset my craft until I was no longer sure that I was proceeding in the right direction, but at last I sighted land and fortunately, with little effort, I located a village which I hoped would prove to be that of my friend, Zan Dar. Hovering above, I could see people moving about within its limits, and upon demagnetizing the hull, the ship became visible to those below and they called upon me to land. Bringing the ship slowly to the ground, I opened the door and stepped outside.....

Lost on Jupiter



CHAPTER I

It was with no little feeling of apprehension that I advanced upon the little group of people who had gathered at the edge of the village to receive me after my ship had touched the ground.

In the innermost reaches of one's mind, there is that peculiar instinct which gives one a premonition of danger and, at one time or another as the cause arises, this inherent quality comes to the surface warning him of impending trouble. Being no exception to the rule, I could not help but feel that everything was not as I had so enthusiastically hoped during my long and hazardous flight across that storm-lashed ocean—a storm which saw my craft tossed about like a feather, every moment of its endurance threatening to precipitate me into the depths of the colossel sea below which crested waves of titanic proportions dwarfed the loftiest mountains in significance.

There had been times when the storm abated in strength and the velocity of the wind died down to a mere whisper, and the rosy hue around me became a scene of the utmost tranquillity had I not looked down at that terrible expanse of churning tidal waves, ever present due to the constant shifting of the planet's four nearest moons. It was during periods such as these that I had given much thought to my reunion with Dejah Thoris upon my arrival in Zanor. I also gave some time for conjecture as to what must be done in order to thwart the spectre-like Morgors in their plans for the subjugation of my beloved Helium. As quickly as possible I must find the means of returning to Mars and warn Tardos Mors of the coming invasion and then decide what must be done to combat this menace and bring about its downfall. And the sooner I was to be reunited with my incomparable princess, the sooner I'd be able to formulate a plan which would see us back to Barsoom and Helium.

I harbored no delusions that my present craft could possibly cross the vast expanse of interstellar space for it needed little more than a minute inspection with the naked eye for my senses to perceive that this craft was incapable of space travel. This meant that, if Zan Dar could not furnish me with a more feasible solution to the problem confronting me, I must again return to the land of the Morgors and find the means of acquiring a flyer such as the one that had brought me to this strange world. That my present craft was capable of the invisibility process leaned heavily in my favor and certainly would be an important factor toward my success need I return to the Morgors to obtain another ship.

However, be that as it may, the moment at hand required my fullest attention, and as I approached the little group of people more closely, I could see that there was distinct hostility written upon their countenances and my senses seemed to say that neither Dejah Thoris nor the others were within the village. In any event, the fat was now in the fire and I had no alternative but to try to make the best of the matter, so I raised my arm in a token of friendship, but had no sooner done so when the foremost in the group whipped out a sword with lightning-like rapidity and pressed its point against my naked chest. At a word from him, two or the others at his side

quickly disarmed me and then stood directly to my rear and faced the man who brandished the sword, who thereupon ran his eyes across my features. He then lowered his sword and proceeded to walk slowly around me until he was directly in front of me again.

"You certainly aren't a Morgor," he said, "and yet you are no Savstor. What brings you alone in a Morgor ship to the village of Kor Zan? I am Kor Zan. Speak, fellow!" and he reialed his blade again to my chest.

"My name is John Carter," I said, "and I am from another world called Garobus. I came here in this ship, which I stole from the Morgors, seeking the land of Zanor."

"You are indeed in the land of Zanor," replied Kor Zan, "and I have heard of Garobus which lies far beyond the cloud envelope surrounding all Eurobus; but how came you to Eurobus, and why?"

"I was brought here from Garobus by the Morgors, through no fault of my own," I answered, deciding to play it square with Kor Zan, for it took no second guess to see that this community was at odds with the skeleton men. I thereupon gave him a brief account of what had happened since the time that U Dan had inticed me from my garden in Helium.

For some time Kor Zan stood scrutinizing me if weighing a decision. Finally, he sheathed his sword and spoke: "For countless ages we Savstors have been constantly harassed by the Morgors who come in great numbers to do us battle. We, being a primitive people, haven't the means to successfully counter these attacks, depending solely upon our swords as the principal weapon in our defense. Although we always give a good account of ourselves, it does not alter the fact that many of us are invariably carried off into slavery when they leave. Thus, you have the reason for these precautions.

"I am inclined to believe you, John Carter, for I am the father of Zan Dar, who was taken in a Morgor raid, but, if it is as you say, and he and your mate escaped, they have not yet shown up here."

Then my instincts had been correct. But what could have happened? I had seen their ship safely away after U Dan had, at my command, forcibly restrained Dejah Thoris from returning to my side to die or be recaptured. Or rather, I had seen her safely aboard before the door closed rendering the ship invisible. There had been nothing to infer that they weren't speeding toward Zanor as I had turned to meet the advancing Morgors with naked blade. Could it be possible that they were still within the confines of the Morgors? Or did they escape only to have been lost in that hideous sea which had so nearly claimed me? I could not bear to think of this second inference as I well knew that one could not last for more than an instant in those tumultuous waves.

Kor Zan saw the consternation which swept over my mien and stepped forward, laying a hand upon my shoulder. "Come into the village, my friend," he said, kindly, "and partake with me of food and drink, for you must be fatigued after so long and perilous a journey."

I must admit I was feeling a little the worse for wear, being both tired and hungry, so, with a nod, I accepted his invitation and Kor Zan, with a gesture, waved aside the group standing behind him; and, with his hand still upon my shoulder, we walked into the village.

CHAPTER II

My first impression of the village of Kor Zan was that of tolerable indifference, but as I more closely examined the structure of the huts we passed, I could see that they were built entirely of solid rock, apparently hewn from the side of the mountain on which the village lay. As there were hundreds of these huts, some being two stories high, my imagination was staggered by the thought

of the immensity of the project, and of the time and effort that must have been consumed in the construction of such a village.

That the dwellings were indeed hewn from the mountain-side was evidenced a moment later when we came upon a small excavation in which men were busily engaged at chipping stone from what had once been a perpendicular cliff. I could see that the cliff's face, from the summit, had been inwardly cut for some eighteen or twenty feet, leaving at its base a rectangular block of stone about eight feet high and twelve feet wide.

From the tools at their disposal, which were, as near as I could see, nothing more than crudely made hammers, chisels and shovels, countless ages of time must have passed since that day in the dim and distant past when some progenitor of these aborigines had struck the first blow in the side of a mountain and began the herculean task of carving an entire village out of solid rock. I was later to learn, much to my dismay, that the terrific storms that buffeted the region made living in solid stone houses imperative, as anything of a lesser nature would constitute plain suicide so intense were these Jupiterian storms.

We continued down the main village street of stone, worn smooth by myriad footfalls of the ages, until we came to a large two-story dwelling whose marble-like sides were polished to a dull lustre and, upon entering, I could see more of the amazing qualities in the crude architecture of these primitive people. Unlike the drear interiors of the Morgor buildings, these walls were carved into beautiful etchings of symmetrical design, giving a pleasant atmosphere to the room.

After satisfying my hunger at a meal served by Kor Zen's mate, I was led up a narrow flight of stone steps to an apartment on the second floor in which there were no windows; the only other opening other than the doorway through which we entered, was an oblique slit about two inches high and eight or nine inches wide on the wall near the ceiling on the opposite side of the room, and through this slit a small amount of light was filtered from the outside. Kor Zen told me that these small openings were in all the sleeping rooms and served as ventilators. At one side of the room was a dais on which were piled several furry animal hides and, immediately Kor Zen had quit the room, I laid down and at once fell asleep.

As there is no way of measuring time, as we know it, on this world or perpetual daylight, I had no way of knowing how long I had been asleep before I was rudely awoken by what seemed to be a vigorous shaking of the dais upon which I lay. Abruptly, I sat up to the accompaniment of the most frightful wail that had ever smote upon my ears. Completely mystified, I arose rather unsteadily and made my way to the head of the flight of steps which I descended as rapidly as possible to the floor below.

Kor Zen, his mate and two other females were seated at the stone table where I had feasted earlier and upon which lay a small transparent receptacle which gave off a brilliant light. This artificial illumination was necessitated by the aperture which served as windows being tightly closed by slabs of stone wedged in from the outside of the building, shutting off all the natural light.

"What is wrong?" I demanded in a loud tone to make myself heard above the din.

Kor Zen's reply was lost in a crashing sound which reverberated throughout the hut and threatened to burst my ear-drums. When he finally could make himself heard, he rose and shouted: "A great storm is upon us and for what one's life is worth he must remain indoors until it passes. What you hear and feel are the effects of the terrible velocity of the wind. That great crashing sound you just heard was of some obstacle being blown

against the side of the hut, probably a large tree. Come with me."

I followed him into the outer room where a great stone slab completely covered the doorway through which I had first entered the hut. I was wondering how this tremendous weight had been put into place when Kor Zen applied his shoulder to one side of the slab and, with hardly an effort, commanded moving it away from the doorway, much in the manner of a sliding door. At a glance, I saw how this was accomplished. Just inside the threshold, a trough of the same dimensions as the base of the slab, had been chiseled out of the floor to a depth of about eight inches. On the bed of this trough lay a thick, dark-colored liquid which acted as a lubricant upon which the great stone could be moved with ease. The trough extended to the left of the doorway for the full width of the slab, where it therein rested when not in use. At the right of the threshold, leaning against the wall, was a small block of stone, smooth but for a hand-hold at one end and I could see that this block would fit perfectly into the trough as to be hardly noticeable when the great door was not needed.

Kor Zen succeeded in aliding back the slab until he had an opening of an inch or two and, stepping aside, shouted: "Look!"

The crescendo of the storm was tenfold as I peered out beyond the small crack and I was awestricken by the appalling sight which met my eyes.

The rosy hue of the Jupiterian atmosphere was gone, and in its place was a scene of sickly yellow. The entire upper regions was a seething mass of billowing clouds, churning across the sky with incredible speed. Great trees and boulders were hurtled through the air like so many toys tossed by the arm of a mythic giant, and now and then a boulder would come smashing to the ground only to disappear in dust as the fury of the wind swept it from view. Once, I had a glimpse of some gigantic animal which had had the misfortune of being carried aloft. The creature came sailing along, head over heels, and a moment later was gone from sight to an unknown fate.

The summit of the mountain seemed bent to the raging tempest, so violent was the storm's wrath; and short distance away, I saw a mighty forest giant being torn from the ground, a few remaining roots holding it for a mere instant as if in supplication to the soil, before it was borne away on the wings of the wind.

But most terrible of all was the sense of utter despair which besieged me as I thought of the safety of my ship. Would it still lie at the edge of the village as I had left it? This I doubted, for it was evident that it could never survive this frightful upheaval of nature.

I motioned Kor Zen to close the slab, and we returned to the inner chamber.

"How long will it last?" I shouted.

"It is difficult to tell," replied Kor Zen. "Sometimes they pass very quickly. At other times, I've seen them last for several sleeps."

"But I must see to my ship," I said, emphatically; "and, if it hasn't already been carried away and destroyed, I must get it to a safe place. What think you, Kor Zen, of its chance for survival?"

Kor Zen shrugged. "I do not know, my friend," he said. "It is possible that the full force of the wind may have missed it entirely, but do not allow my seeming optimism to raise your hopes too highly in the face of such an omnipotent storm, but," he added, in a tone which lacked conviction, "there is a chance."

We had eaten three times and slept once since the storm began and still it had not spent any of its fury. All of my wakeful hours had seen me chafing with apprehension over the fate of my craft. I was thoroughly convinced that, were I to be reunited with my princess, I must return to the land of the Morgore and begin my quest

anew, for, barring the possibility of her ship being lost at sea, I could reasonably assume that she was still there, but whether again in the hands of the skeleton men, I could not conjecture.

The more I let my mind dwell upon the subject, the more I became incensed with the perplexity of the situation; and if Kor Zen entertained the slightest conviction that my ship still stood, I decided that I must ascertain the truth for I could not afford to overlook the possibility, however slim. If it were still there, I could transfer it to a more favorable position in the lee of the storm, thus reassuring its safety until the storm had passed.

Finally, casting discretion aside, I announced to Kor Zen that I would try to make it back to where the ship lay, and whether he had anticipated my coming decision or whether he had seen the futility of attempting to dissuade me, he silently rose and preceded me to the great stone doorway in the outer room.

"I can see that it's useless to try to inhibit your determination in attempting this foolhardy venture," he admonished, "but if you must go, try to keep the huts between yourself and the force of the wind, keeping as low to the ground as you can, preferably upon your stomach." He then put his shoulder to the door and opened it far enough to permit the passage of my body. I thereupon proceeded to inch my way around the corner of the wall until I stood on the outside with my back braced against the jamb of the doorway. As the great door slid shut, I heard Kor Zen shout something which sounded like "good luck" but I could not be sure as his voice was lost in the turbulence that was now upon me.

Well, the die was cast. I stood for a moment collecting my bearings, then, without further esteem, I assumed a crouching position and plunged into the wind. I was immediately swept backwards and had I not caught hold of the projecting door jamb where I had been standing an instant before, my venture would have been finished hardly had it begun. As it were, I had an exceedingly difficult time clinging to the jamb, but I finally managed to pull myself into the doorway where I lay panting with exertion.

I saw that the force of the storm was bearing from the direction in which the ship lay, and recalling Kor Zen's admonition, I reasoned that if I prostrated myself, my head into the wind to offer the least resistance, I may, with moderate certainty, be able to gain slow progress to the head of the village street if I kept a hut between myself and the brunt of the wind. So, much in the manner of an Apache Indian, I slowly wormed myself out into the open space which separated Kor Zen's hut from the next and, by taking advantage of any hand-holds with which my groping fingers came in contact, I found myself making headway against the wind. Presently, I was on the threshold of the next hut.

Proceeding in a like manner, I slowly made my way from hut to hut until at last I was at the foremost building on the street. I peered around the corner and, with a shout of exultation, I saw that which had become an obsession with me, still standing as I had left it, less than a hundred feet away!

My joy was short lived, however, as I realized that the direction in which the ship lay was now at right angles to that which I had been pursuing. This meant that I must cover the remaining distance cross wind; but my spirits had been so elated by my success thus far that I quickly dismissed from my mind any misgivings as to my ability to traverse the space between in safety.

But I had no sooner left the comparative protection of the hut when, much to my dismay, I felt myself being lifted from the ground, but luckily my fingers came in contact with a projection in the stone flagging to which I clung tenaciously. The wind had swung my legs around

so that when I pulled myself to the ground I was facing the direction again at right angles to the ship. Then, fully prostrate, I began a series of barrel-rolls toward the ship. I was less than twenty feet from my goal when I realized that I had blundered. The further I rolled from the proximity of the village, the more violent the fury of the wind became, and, as I felt the inevitable about to happen, I scraped frantically at the ground until my fingers were raw and bleeding, but this time I encountered no rewarding projection.

With a jerk, I was borne from the ground and swept into the air with incredible swiftness.

CHAPTER III

That I were fully cognizant of the storm's violence and had witnessed the consequences of its furious assault upon the flora and fauna which had had the misfortune of being carried aloft, it had in no way pattered a preconception of what my own fate would be if I should suddenly be thrust into a similar position. Had I preconceived such a picture, it certainly couldn't have attained the magnitude of the sensations I now felt as I was hurled through space.

Thereto could be but one outcome I hadn't the slightest doubt, and with each turn and twist of my body, I fully expected to be dashed to pieces against one of the numerous mountain peaks in the area. With a harrowing effort, using my arms and legs as stabilizers, I somewhat managed to regain my equilibrium, hence being carried along on a mora or less even keel. I saw that the mountains were below me and that the rate of speed at which I were being blown, so much the part of the debris around me, was terrifying in the extreme.

The panorama beneath was of both grandeur and desolation and with each passing mile the scene became more wild and barren, completely devoid of all signs of life. Great yawning canyons, some of which burrowed to a depth of twenty miles or more, were predominant; and, here and there, trees whose boles must have measured hundred feet in diameter, dotted the landscape, rearing their storm-lashed heads a mile above their bases.

God alone knows how long and how far I was carried over that vast Jupiterian island, and I was beginning to wonder what my final fate would be when I became aware of the close proximity of a large tree limb bearing down upon me, and before I could make an effort to dodge the thing, I was struck a glancing blow on the side of the head with such forceful impact that everything before me went black.

A throbbing headache accompanied the slow return of consciousness and the first thing my senses perceived was the death-like silence around me. Except for a slight awaying motion of my body and a faint rustling, as of leaves disturbed by a gentle breeze, all was as still as the tomb. I opened my eyes and saw that the rosy hue had returned, and that I was lying at a grotesque angle, spread-eagled in what seemed to be a large net of very fine texture which interwove around my body from head to foot. I immediately tried to extricate my arms and legs but soon found that it was an impossible task. I thereupon commenced to thresh about in an attempt to burst the fine threads that held me, but this, too, proved to be beyond my strength and only served to entangle me the more. With an epithet of disgust, I gave up my efforts, completely baffled.

The angle at which I was enmeshed gave my eyes full command of all before and above me, and I saw that I was enveloped in either a large bush or the uppermost reaches of a tree, but whether or not the network which held me was part of its natural growth I could not tell, for, as far as I could see, the periphery of this network was lost in the foliage. By straining my right arm

end twisting my body to the left, drawing out the resilient material, I was able to turn far enough to see what was beneath me, and to my surprise, I saw that I was no more than ten feet from the ground which was of a grassy nature much like the green swards of Earth.

I resumed my former position and was contemplating my dilemma when my thoughts were interrupted by a rustling sound from the turf below and, twisting again so as to command the scene beneath, I observed that the sound emanated from a clump of shrubbery some twenty yards distant from the tree in which I was imprisoned. And at that moment, there burst upon my vision the most horrid creature my eyes had ever perceived on three worlds!

It stood at the edge of the shrubbery from which it had emerged, eying me intently—great protruding eyes of a brilliant scarlet, like two immense disks of glowing fire set in a purple colored face much smaller in proportion as to what those great eyes should have prescribed. Below the eyes and underneath the jaw-bone, were three pairs of slavering mandibles each about two feet long, moving inwards and outwards, scissor-like. On top of the cranium was a large conical bone structure which grew the width of the creature's head, curving backward, upward, and then forward for about four feet, terminating in a razor-sharp edge just above the eyes. There was no neck, and its round, hairy body, supported on twelve jointless legs, measured fully ten feet in diameter. As near as I could see, it had no tail.

That the creature had been lying there in the shrubbery since my incarceration, I didn't doubt, for, if it hadn't, it was obvious that I would have heard the movement of that great body long since.

Suddenly I realized, with no little horror, just what it was that held me tightly enmeshed! I was in this creature's web! It apparently had been lying in the shrubbery, out of sight, waiting for a victim as a spider waits for a fly; and at the moment, I constituted its next meal!

With a feeling slightly akin to terror, I saw the creature slowly moving toward me, its twelve legs weaving about like the tentacles of an octopus, and, after another futile effort to release myself from the web, I resigned myself to fate.

To die thus helpless! It was humiliating, to say the least. I, John Carter, Prince of Helium and Warlord of Mars, forming the diet of an alien beast in an unknown corner of an alien world. Oh, for the feel of a trusty sword with which to cut my bonds and face the creature! If die I must, how better I would have preferred it if it were with naked steel in hand in pursuit of my vocoation!

The creature was only a few feet away when I again heard a crashing sound in the brush, but this time it was directly to my rear and out of my line of vision. Was another of these repulsive monstrosities rushing in to share the feast? I surely thought so, and as the crashing grew louder in volume the creature before me halted its advance, its horrid, tusk-like mandibles fleshing furiously back and forth. It issued forth a low, hissing rumble, and swung its massive bulk slightly to the right and stood facing whatever was coming up to my rear. Now, hoarse shouts broke the air, and there suddenly burst into view directly below me, a half-dozen man-like creatures brandishing long swords and yelling wildly.

These warriors proceeded to encircle the monster and, at a word of command from one, attacked it with vicious intentive.

My rescuers—if that is what they were—were utterly fearless of the beast and they commanded darting in and out with amazing celerity, hacking and jabbing with their swords. No less fearless was the beast, however, standing its ground and hissing shrilly—a veritable giant, annoyed at this rash interruption at mealtime. As the

effects of the sword thrusts began to drew blood, the creature, infuriated with rage and pain, rushed blindly among its attackers who nimbly side-stepped each mad charge and drove their weapons into the beast's sides as it went by. I had never seen such sure-footed quickness! It reminded me of a mongoose with a cobre et bay.

Presently one of the attackers leaped in close, his sword poised for a thrust at one of the beast's saucer-like eyes but, upon dodging one leshing tentacle, he either became over-optimistic or misjudged his own prowess, for another tentacle whipped around his waist with lightning-like rapidity and swept the unfortunate warrior into the lethal mandibles which pierced his body as though it were a pin-cushion. The beast then cast the warrior to the ground and, using its head protuberance like a meat cleaver, proceeded to cut the dead body into pieces. Notwithstanding the sword thrusts of the five remaining warriors, the creature commenced to scoop the bloody chunks into its cavernous maw and, in less time than it takes to tell it, its victim's remains were gone.

This episode marked the beginning of the end for the monster. The unrelenting swordes had now pierced its vitals and had weakened the creature to the extent that its rubbery legs had a difficult time supporting its great bulk. They sagged like worn out leather, causing the beast to stagger and stumble constantly. Then one of the five warriors, with a shout of triumph, leaped in at close quarters and drove his blade to the hilt into one of the creature's great eyes. With a loud hiss of anguish, the massive body sank to the ground and, after a few spasmodic twitches, it lay quite still.

The victorious warriors then proceeded to remove the creature's furry pelt with daggers they had drawn from sheaths supported on their hips, and in an amazingly short time the hide lay stretched upon the green turf. Three of the warriors then commenced to scrape the inner surface of the hide, removing all vestiges of adhering blood and tissue, while the other two hacked off large portions of the still quivering mountain of raw flesh. When they had accomplished their respective tasks, they laid the cuts of dripping flesh upon the pelt and all five began to strip the leathery skin from the creature's legs. After all twelve skins had been removed and scraped, they dissected each vertically into thongs about two inches wide. Turning again to the pelt, they took one side and folded it over the meet in the center. By doing likewise to the remaining sides they now had an oblong bundle which they tied securely with the thongs of skin from the creature's legs.

When this was finished, one of the warriors gathered some dry leaves and twigs and piled them near a large limb in which he cut a small depression with his dagger. He then placed a small quantity of the leaves into the hole and, taking a stick of wood, he put one end into the leaves and commenced whirling it rapidly back and forth between his palms. Presently a thin wisp of smoke rewarded his efforts and soon a brisk fire was blazing merrily.

The other warriors, in the meantime, had cut off some of the remaining flesh from the bloody mass of pulp that had been the monster and, spitting it on the ends of sharp sticks, began grilling the meat over the flames.

I was beginning to wonder when these warriors would call a temporary halt to their activities in order to free me from my predicament, when it occurred to me that none of them had so much as cast a momentary glance in my direction. Could it be possible that they were completely unaware of my presence?

This assumption proved correct a few moments later when, becoming somewhat annoyed at their seeming ignorance, I called down to them to release me from my bondage.

To say that the warriors were surprised when my voice broke the silence would be putting it rather mildly. They stopped abruptly and peered into the foliage of the tree; and, as their eyes perceived my position in the tree, a look of absolute incredulity crossed the features of each. The one whom I had designated as being the leader cautiously advanced until he stood directly beneath me. After a moment's scrutiny, his incredulous look changed to one of sardonic amusement.

"Ho, warriors," he called to his companions, "come hither and see what we have here!"

The others approached until all five were grouped around my tree.

"What manner of man is that?" demanded one; "and what is the fool doing in the sooth's web?"

"He has red skin," observed another. "I have never seen such before. He's no Haskian, of that I am sure. Perhaps he is one of those fire demons Sar tells us about."

"Or the sooth's spawn," jibed a third with a loud guffaw.

The warriors spoke in the Jupiterien language with which I was familiar, betraying only a slight accent to the words; and it bore out a fact which was in evidence with me since my advent upon the great planet—that, as it is on Mars, the language is universal. At least it is in the part of the planet's surface I have traversed, having heard no other or any indication that there is another, among the several races I have encountered.

After a few more comments and jests, two of the men reached up with their swords and commenced cutting the strong threads which held me. Presently, I was able to extricate myself and, with a bound, I landed on the ground beside them.

CHAPTER IV

Now for the first time I was able to observe as to what manner of men it was who had saved me from the thing which they had called a sooth. I saw that their aspect was much like the Savors, except for high, receding foreheads which gave them the frontal appearance of being bald, but long straggling locks hung from the crown of the head and draped over both sides of the shoulders. Their skins were of a paler blue than the Savors I had known, and all five were naked but for loin cloths of tanned hide.

The warriors, too, were perceptibly curious, examining my features and attire with evident mounting interest.

"Who are you?" asked he who was the leader. "How did your skin become so red; and what is this strange accouterment you wear?" He plucked at one of my harness straps, letting it snap back against my chest.

"I am John Carter," I replied, "a stranger in your country. Where am I and how far is it from Zanor, the country of Kor Zen, the chieftain?"

"I know naught of what you speak," said the leader, candidly. "I have never heard of anything so preposterous as a stranger in Hesk. You're either here or you're not here and never were—and my eyes tell me that you are standing in front of me. And what is this Zanor of which you speak? There is no such place in all the world. I have made several circuits of the world and have explored most of its interior, but I have never seen nor heard of any place of which I have had no knowledge."

"If you have circled the world," I said, astonished, "you must then have heard of the Morgors, for their power and influence stretches from pole to pole."

"I am Jek, son of Xog, king of the world," said he, ardently. "In the knowledge of Hesk, there is none more proficient than I and, if I have not heard of a place or thing, then it does not exist; and I have never heard of anything you have mentioned."

He spoke with such firm conviction and finality that I at once became convinced that these be-

nighted beings had no conception whatsoever of any other lands beyond their own boundaries, for, if they had, doubtless they would at least have had some indelible suggestion of the tyrannical Morgors who had virtually conquered every known civilization upon the planet of Jupiter, so, concluding that further commitments would be quite incomprehensible, I decided to draw him out.

"How large is the world," I asked, "and where in it is Hesk?"

"Why Hesk is the world!" he exclaimed, emphatically; "and it is very large. Do you see Roharzen yonder?" He extended a forefinger in the direction of a large, imposing volcano from which a thin wisp of smoke was lazily drifting upwards. "That is the center of the world, and from its peak you can barely discern the boundaries, in every direction, far in the distance. But, I know not why I am telling you this as it is common knowledge to any fool."

"But I tell you I am not of Hesk," I cried in alteration. "I am a stranger here."

Jek shrugged. "As you will," he said, and then, after indicating to the others to resume grilling the meat, he took my arm and led me to the top of a small hillock a short distance away.

"There is the end of the world," he said, sweeping his arm in the general direction of a majestic range of mountains which lay beyond our frontage—mountains whose summits were lost in the clouds far above. Turning, Jek faced the opposite direction. "The limits of Hesk," he said, "are too far distant to be seen in this direction, suffice it to say that they are a full twenty marches away." Assuming a look of arrogant satisfaction, he added: "Did I not tell you that Hesk is large?"

"It is a very large world," I acquiesced, thinking of what the reaction would be if I told him that this world of his was merely a small pinpoint of territory on the largest planet of our solar system.

Solicitoriously, I commenced to understand just what sort of country into which I had been cast. The closest mountain barrier was about five miles distant from where we stood and, as near as I could see, it appeared to be obsidian-like, smooth, and absolutely perpendicular for a height of some twenty-five miles where it disappeared into the lower extremities of the cloud envelope. This barrier extended to right and left, gradually circling inward until it became obscure in the distance.

This revelation, concurring with Jek's outline, gave me the disquieting impression that Hesk was thus hemmed on all sides, being impervious to ingress or egress other than by the same means by which I had apparently descended into this strange land.

Sharp cries from behind interrupted further reasoning and Jek, without a word, turned and ran quickly down the side of the hillock, passing from sight into the thicket behind which we had left the other warriors. Puzzled, I followed at a brisk pace and, upon entering the clearing, I saw all five Haskians busily engaged in a contest of swords with some seven or eight hairy, ape-like creatures, all of whom were none the less proficient and agile as were their opponents. Intermingled with the sound of clashing blades and the hoarse cries of the Haskians were fierce bellows much like those of maddened bulls which came from the throats of the hairy attackers. Fascinated, I stood at the edge of the shrubbery watching the melee with increasing impulsion.

When I had been disarmed by Kor Zen's men upon my arrival in Zanor, I had not yet retrieved my weapons before the coming of the storm had made it impossible, consequently, I was completely unarmed when the wind bore me from the ground. Now, as I saw that Jek and his men were being hard pressed by the outnumbering attackers, I could only offer my feelings of compassion in their behalf.

At this point, one of the bestial creatures espied me and, with a bellowing roar, he bore down upon me with a brandished sword. Just then I caught the glint of a bright object lying near the bloody carcass of the sort which lay a few paces from me and, as I recognized it for what it was, I hastily seized it in time to parry the vicious thrust of the beast-man's blade. What had saved me was the weapon of the unfortunate Haekian who had been devoured by the sort, and it was with an invigorating sense of jubilation that I again felt the weight of a sword in hand.

The best-man was no mean swordsman however, and as we crossed, I soon found that I had on my hands an opponent worthy of the sword he wielded, and it took every effort to keep his blade from my body and at a respectable distance therefrom. But, as it has been in the case of countless others, my excellence in swordsmanship prevailed and shortly thereafter, my adversary lay prone upon the ground, his heart pierced.

Whirling, I saw at a glance that one of the Haekians had been despatched and that Jak and his surviving companions were waging a losing battle against seven beast-men.

Without hesitation, I leaped into the fray and in less than ten earthly seconds another had fallen to the relentless endeavor of my attack. And as the Haekians became aware of my flashing blade and of the fury of my assault, they pressed their advantage with renewed vigor, and in a relatively short time, the last of the beast-men lay dead upon the ground—my blade having accounted for half the original number. I mention this without reservation and with no attempt to border on the bravado, for, just as the artist takes pride in his skill with the brush and the surgeon is aware of his potency with the scalpel, I, none the less, am fully confident in my prowess as a fighting man, my vocation by choice.

Needless to say, the surviving Haekians were overwhelmingly grateful for my part in the final outcome of the battle, and the next several minutes were taken up by numerous compliments and much back-slapping until I was forced to intercede out of sheer embarrassment.

"I can well believe that you are not of Haek, John Carter," said Jak, enthusiastically, "for never have I seen such a superb display of swordsmanship. You fought like a veritable fiend incarnate."

I managed to end the topic of admiration by jerking my thumb at the inert bodies of our erstwhile foes. "Who or what are those creatures?" I asked.

"They are Duags," replied Jak, "and no creature in all Haek is more ferocious and more blood-thirsty than one of them. They are ruthless killers by nature, it being their incentive to kill for the pure joy of killing, and anyone who has the misfortune of being beset by the Duags, can expect to be given no quarter. They roam in small groups over the length and breadth of Haek, usually not more than twenty to a group including the females and young, and, as they are semi-aquatic, they generally make their homes in the trees. They migrate constantly and are never in the same place for two successive sleeps."

Jak's companions had now finished grilling the sort meat of which they offered me a generous portion and, in spite of the repulsive nature of its origin inasmuch as it induced the nauseating fancy that I was about to consume an overgrown, pulpy insect, I soon discovered that the charred flesh was quite palatable and delicious in the extreme. I later learned that these monstrous sorts were profusely hunted by the Haekians for the abundant amount of food they furnished, and due to some inexplicable manifestation of nature, the flesh of these beasts could be kept, exposed, for a considerable period without spoiling. The hides, too, were highly regarded, being used for sleeping furs and body attire.

I also learned that, inasmuch as the entire

confines of this unknown land were called Haek, that, also was the name applied to the principal villages from whence Jak and his comrades had emanated.

During the course of the meal, I outlined briefly, and as simply as possible, the chain of events leading up to my quite unparalleled entry into the land of Haek, to which, much to my delight, Jak and the others treated with concerned sobriety, but whether or not they grasped the significance of their tiny world's vast environments would be difficult to say. I roughly illustrated the relationship of the sun and planets by drawing on the ground with the stick upon which my meat had been spitted, and the warriors, squatting on their haunches around my rough sketch, showed their manifest interest in the subject with nods and assenting murmurs of apparent understanding. Their high foreheads, without doubt, were indicative of a remarkable intelligence in view of the humble advance in the stage of evolution to which these people had progressed. But, be that as it may, it would be a hazardous guess to assume just to what extent my lesson in astronomy had penetrated their consciousness.

The meal over, Jsk's men entered the surrounding thicket, emerging a short time later, each with an armful of branches of various lengths. Taking two stout limbs, each about seven feet long, they placed them upon the ground parallel with each other and about three feet apart. With their daggers, two of the warriors cut the smaller branches to appropriate length, laying each cross-wise between the two larger limbs, while the third man tied each branch securely with tough grass fibers to the outlying shafts at where they intersected. Presently, they had a rude litter, upon which they placed the hide of the sort containing the huge supply of meat.

"You will, of course, accompany us to Haek," spoke Jak to me, preparatory to their departure, "since I can offer no solution to your quandary other than to live out your life as a free man in the village of Xog, my father. It is regrettable that these Morgore of whom you speak constitute such a menace to your world and the lands which you say are beyond Haek; but you are here and here you must stay, for never in the existence of man has the conception of leaving Haek been deemed possible."

I must say that these tidings were anything but comforting. But, being invested with the perseverance that has long been characteristic of me, I had no intention of resolving myself to my fate—at least not without first exploring every latent consideration that there may be an existing means of access to the world beyond the impregnable wall which encompassed me.

Patiando, also, was a virtue with which I had been endowed. Unquestionably, the realms of madness would long since have descended upon me had I not had the fortitude to endure the innumerable states of repression which has been so much the part of my long and arduous career. So, for the present, I decided to let future contingencies rest and, after indicating to Jak that I would accompany them, two of the warriors thereupon picked up the litter and without a backward glance at the scattered bodies of friend and foe, started off in the direction of the village of Xog, king of the world.

CHAPTER V

Moving in a leisurely fashion along a well beaten trail through verdurous undergrowth, Jak and I, bringing up the rear, conversed freely.

I learned that these Haekians were mostly hunters by profession although some devoted their talents to farming and building. A few, also, were smelters, in which they forged weapons, tools and domestic utensils from the ore they refined. Their world consisted of the principal village of Haek and five other villages of a

lesser degree. All six were ruled by Xog, the king, with each of the others having a sub-chief who was supreme in his respective habitat, but all governmental standard and procedure came down from Haek and was the law of the land.

We had now emerged from the maze of undergrowth, the trail skirting the edge of a wide-spread area of steaming swampland, one side of which was bordered by a low, rocky escarpment. At the area's other extremity was an enormous abutment of the mountain range which hemmed Haek, stretching far above and gradually fading from view as it blended into the upper atmosphere.

Suddenly, a low, ominous rumble, which seemed to come from beneath our feet, broke the stillness and brought our little cavalcade to a halt.

"This," said Jak, "is called The Valley of Spouting Waters. Watch!"

The rumbling grew louder in volume, accompanied by a sharp hissing as of pressure being released from a steam locomotive. Suddenly, at about a hundred yards to our left, there burst from the boggy ground, a column of water shooting into the air for thousands of feet. This column remained at its height for several minutes then slowly receded and sank gurgling into the ground. No sooner had it sank from sight, however, when another erupted far to our left, this one gushing upward for several miles before reaching its pinnacle and tumbling off in a veritable deluge of steam and spray.

"Do you see that pit near the center of the valley?" asked Jak, pointing across the swamp to where I could discern a large rocky area in the center of which was a circular orifice about a hundred feet wide. "That," he continued, as I nodded acknowledgement, "is the lair of The Great Fountain, which is the source of life within Haek. Without it, we would not have the rain in which our streams and lekes are replenished of their supply of water."

I turned my head from the direction of the swamp and looked him straight in the eyes. His implication was clear, but extremely hard to believe.

"Do you mean to say," I said, incredulously, "that this geyser—this Great Fountain—erupts with such force that it waters all Haek with its spray?"

"Not directly," replied Jak; "but it does water all of Haek. The Great Fountain, unlike the lesser of its kind, projects its waters far aloft into the clouds where they are absorbed and carried to all parts of the world, later falling in the form of pure rain. Sometimes The Great Fountain will spout several times before a single drop of rain falls—Listen!" he cried abruptly, "do you hear it? I believe it is about to erupt!"

A dull, booming rumble issued forth from the great hole across the swamp, increasing in volume until it reached a deafening pitch. Suddenly, from the mouth of the pit, there leapt into view, a great mushroom of water which shot skyward at such an appalling rate of speed that it was lost from sight in an instant.

For several minutes I was aghast at the spectacle before me. Here was a column of water, a hundred feet wide, shooting billions of gallons upward and not a drop falling back to the ground below. That the clouds could possibly absorb such a tremendous amount of water was utterly absurd and ridiculous. Some other solution to this inferable, but highly incongruous, theory must lie, unseen, in the depths of the clouds above. Of that I was certain, but I said nothing to Jak for I hadn't the slightest idea as to what I could offer in explanation of this remarkable phenomenon.

The Great Fountain remained at its peak for a much greater time than the lesser geysers, but eventually I saw the great mushroom emerge from the clouds, descending very rapidly and finally disappearing into the pit from whence it came.

Resuming our journey, the trail led up the

rocky escarpment which bordered the valley and finally out upon a vast meadow-like plain, dotted with gorgeously colored shrubs and trees. Multi-colored flowers, superlatively flamboyant and of a uniform height, grew in riotous profusion, putting to shame the most exquisite of the well-kept botanical gardens of Earth. My senses reeled in rapture to the enchanting fragrance which assailed my nostrils.

We entered this natural garden and had proceeded forward for a mile or two when Rek, the warrior who was in the van of our column, came to a sudden halt and beckoned Jak and me to come forward.

"What do you make of that?" he asked, pointing in the direction in which we were proceeding.

My eyes followed his extended forefinger far out across the plain. At first I could see nothing but the gently waving plumage of myriad blossoms, but after a moment's observation, I saw what appeared to be two humens racing at top speed, one several paces ahead of the other. Both were advancing toward us but on a diagonal course to our own.

All five of us now stood abreast watching the rapidly approaching runners and as they came within earshot, the faint but distinct bellow of a Duag could be plainly heard:

What took place in the ensuing short interval of time happened so fast that the telling of it seems like an eternity.

As the first faint notes of the Duag's bellow became discernible, the four Heekians immediately unsheathed their swords and charged madly toward the two runners. Not knowing as to what the others would do, as neither of the runners were yet close enough to be recognizable, I had waited for them to take the initiative—and well it is that I did.

They had no sooner commenced their mad charge, and I, drawing my blade, was about to follow suit, when I suddenly detected the movement of a long, scaly body gliding through the blossoms directly in front of the Duag and his quarry. The creature was slithering swiftly toward them from a direction directly opposite that from which they were coming and at a scant hundred yards distant.

It is a known fact that, due to the lesser gravity of the planet Mars, I have been able to perform seemingly miraculous feats of agility, such as leaping for great heights and distances at a single bound. No less agile, however, was I on the planet Jupiter, for the rapid, ten-hour cycle of revolution upon its axis gave my earthly Barsoom the same capabilities as they had upon Barsoom.

Instantly, I judged the situation before me at a glance. The reptile would intercept the foremost runner long before Jak and his comrades could intercede, and it was apparent that none had as yet seen the approach of the slimy creature for both parties continued on their original routes, the two runners bearing head-on into the monster which was moving rapidly to meet them from the flank of Jak's advance.

With a shout, I sprang forward in great leaps and bounds, passing my companions as though they were standing still, and, as I neared the creature, I saw that I was already too late, for it reared a hideous head and, with distended jaws, prepared to receive the first runner. I now saw that this runner was a female, apparently of the same race as my companions and as she saw the sudden appearance of the terrible jaws before her, she voiced a single shriek of terror and veered sharply to the right. At that moment, without lessening my speed, I drew back my arm and, with all the strength at my command, hurled my sword at the creature just as those terrible jaws were about to close upon the girl. The sword penetrated behind the reptile's neck, inflicting merely a superficial wound, but it was enough to momentarily restrain those awful jaws. The great head turned and struck vainly at the impaled sword,

which was quite beyond its reach, and by the time it regained its composure the girl was safely away. The Dusg, however, was not so fortunate. He came rushing headlong behind the girl and, as the vicious head reared in front of them, he, too, veered sharply, but not quite in time to escape entirely as had the girl. He plunged past just as the creature's head turned to face them after snapping at my sword. As it were, the Dusg, with a nimble side-step, nearly precipitated himself out of reach, but those fearful jaws struck, closing upon the lower part of his hairy leg, up-ending him.

With a final bound, I landed a few feet from them at precisely the same moment that the Dusg fell to the ground and, without hesitation, I grasped the hilt of my sword and extracted it from its position in the reptile's body. Two quick strokes and I had decapitated the creature and swiftly pulled the prostrate Dusg out of range of the great body which was thrashing wildly in the throes of death.

I released the panting Dusg who was emitting low, guttural moans and, upon inspecting his injured member, I saw that the severed head was still impaled in the fleshy calf below the knee. I thereupon grasped both jaws and, as gently as possible, slowly forced them apart until they became disengaged from the Dusg's leg. I then cast the horrid head aside with a gesture of disgust.

Meanwhile, my companions had arrived on the scene and the girl, with a stifled cry, threw herself, sobbing, into Jak's arms.

The others immediately approached to where I stood over the fallen Dusg.

"Is he dead?" asked Rek.

"Yes," I answered, "I decapitated him. He is in his death struggles now," and I jerked a thumb at the rapidly diminishing reflexes of the serpent's body.

"I meant the Dusg. Have you killed him yet?" and Rek glanced at the injured beast-man behind me. "Ah, he is not dead!" he exclaimed. "Here, I will finish him."

"Wait!" I said sharply as he raised his sword. "Why do you wish to kill him?"

"Why?" cried Rek in an incredulous manner. "Because he is a Dusg, that is why. If he is allowed to live, he will doubtless run us all through as the opportunity presents itself. No, he must be slain," and again Rek raised his sword to strike.

No matter how bestial the creature, or what his sanguinary attributes may have been, I could not easily stand by and see cold-blooded murder committed upon a man—for he was still a man; so I promptly grasped Rek by the wrist, staying his uplifted arm. "He will not be slain," I said, firmly.

At this juncture, Jak approached, accompanied by the girl who was still sobbing quite uncontrollably.

"Ula tells me," he announced, "that Sar has led a successful revolt in seizing the reins of government, and that Heak has fallen with Xog, my father, a prisoner in his own palace."

CHAPTER VI

Conflicting emotions appeared upon the countenances of the members of our group with Jak's startling revelation.

Open-mouthed, Lon, one of the litter bearers, stared blankly at Jak as if looking directly through him, while the other bearer, Gof, assumed a questioning attitude, looking first at Jak, then to the girl, Ula, as if anticipating one or the other to deny that which his ears could not believe.

Rek, on the other hand, immediately grasped the full significance of the announcement, for he clasped the hilt of his drawn sword, applying pressure until his blue knuckles turned white. "So," he spat, venomously, "the horyth, Sar, has crawled from his slimy lair and into the open. His traitorous carcass should have long since

been run through with a loyal blade. That, John Carter, is a horyth," and he swept his sword around to indicate the scaly serpent which I had headed; "a fitting cousin to the pompous Sar, and even then I am perpetrating a rank injustice upon the reptile."

After a brief explanation to Ula as to who I was, Jak bade her to relate what she knew of the events which culminated in the overthrow of Xog the king, and, for my benefit, to elucidate her account in such a way that I could follow the narration without unnecessary questioning.

She had ceased her weeping and I saw that she was beautiful. Her hairline, while higher than ordinary, was much lower than that of her male counterparts, the hair itself falling in flowing waves across her shoulders. Drawing a deep breath which terminated abruptly in an audible sob, she spoke:

"It is well known by all that Sar has long aspired to the throne of Heak, not merely because he believes that it is his prerogative, but also because the throne would undoubtedly offer him the free hand he seeks in rejuvenating the ege old ritual which was climaxed by the casting of a living Haekian into the mouth of Moharazan, the mountain or fire. This practice has long since been repudiated by the ancestors of Xog, who, for many generations, were strong advocates in their beliefs that this outrage upon an intelligent and rational people was unprincipled and immoral, and they constantly endeavored to effect the abolishment of this barbarism by inciting rebellious uprisings against its perpetrators. But always were their efforts defeated, and it has been handed down that two of these ancestors, father and son, were themselves cast into the fiery crater upon the termination of one such defeat. Even that failed to stop the insurrectionary movement, for descendant after descendant still continued to carry on the heroic task. Finally, Rab, the grandfather of Xog, rallied enough followers and led a successful coup against the regime of the depraved despot of that time, resulting in a complete victory, and Rab, himself, ascended to the throne of Heak. Since then, this effrontery upon men's dignity has all but been forgotten, being only the shadow of a memory upon the minds of the oldest among us. As you may have guessed, John Carter, Sar is of direct lineage to the dynasty who practiced this cruel and wanton custom. It was his grandfather who was usurped by Rab, who in turn established under a just rule, our present system of laws by which Heak has thrived and prospered.

"Sar has long been an exponent of the wiles of his forbears, and maintains that human sacrifice to majestic Moharazan must be revived to appease the wrath of the fire demons who dwell within its flaming bowels. Most Haekians, being much too prudent, have never taken this man and his doctrines very seriously. Quite to the contrary, Sar has always been considered something of a public fool, and, by most, has been taken for granted as such; but very ingeniously, by the injection of subterfuge and fear, he has now amassed a considerable following, all of whom are willing to support him through promises of impunity from the ultimate disaster which he says will befall those who remain loyal to Xog.

"I first became aware of the trouble when I was awakened from the last sleep by the sounds of shouting and clashing of blades in the courtyard below my chamber. Apprehensively, I hurried to the embrasure and parted the curtain to see a small force of Xog's soldiers beating off the attack of a lesser number of Sar's men. They were almost directly beneath me and fighting furiously. Across the court, and also beyond the palace grounds, I could see other small groups of fighting warriors, and I later learned that similar skirmishes were taking place simultaneously in all parts of the village wherever Xog's men were posted. Sar's strategy was to hold the king's

forces at bay while the main body of rebels, under Sar himself, stormed the palace with the element of surprise as their ally. The plan's success depended upon a quick seizure of the palace ere the bulk of Xog's forces could be pressed into service, reinforcing those who were then on duty. Hardly before anyone was aware of what was really happening, the plan had worked to perfection. In the palace, Xog fought valiantly at the head of his men, but they were no match for the sheer weight of numbers which bore down upon them and they were inevitably overwhelmed and disarmed.

"Sar then appeared on the portals of the palace flanked by a contingent of his warriors just as his other men were fighting a general retreat to the palace pursued by the loyalists, who, by this time, were being greatly reinforced by many others of the king's soldiery as the sound of conflict throughout the village reached their ears.

"Throwing both arms high over his head, Sar brought the fighting to a standstill on the very portals of the palace where he stood.

"Warriors of Hask!" he shouted. "Lay down your weapons! The palace has fallen and Xog, the pretender, is my prisoner. Dare you risk his life by advancing further? I, Sar, in the name of my imperial forefathers, proclaim the throne of Hask to be again in the hands of its rightful owners. Behold Sar, the true king! Lay down your swords, I say! Lay them down or your glorious king dies at my command!"

"It is needless to say that the loyal warriors lost no time in complying with his demand, so great is their love for Xog, and almost at once the air resounded to the echoes of falling steel as sword after sword was dropped to the stone flagging of the courtyard.

"Sar then spoke again, this time demanding that all of Xog's nobles and their families surrender themselves to him, whereupon those of the nobility who were then in the crowd immediately stepped forward and were hustled roughly into the palace. I saw that Jud, my father, was one of them.

"I could watch no further, so I quickly closed the curtain shielding my eyes from the sordid scene below. With my head reeling from the stunning impact of what had taken place before me, I turned from the embrasure and did the only thing of which I was then capable—threw myself upon my sleeping furs and burst into tears. Presently, however, a rough hand jerked me to my feet and I found myself staring at the leering faces of two of Sar's men. They announced that they were part of a detachment who were sent to arrest all members of the nobility and that I was to accompany them to the palace at once.

"Sar, seated upon Xog's throne, was grinning maliciously as I was escorted into his presence, and, with something of an effort, I managed to control my dampened spirits, drew myself straight and stood haughtily before him. His fervent eyes seemed to penetrate into my very soul as they slowly—significantly—ran over my features. For what seemed like an eternity he stared at me thus. Finally, he said: 'Put this one not with the others, but conduct her to the King's private chambers. There, the fair daughter of Jud will become acquainted with her fate at my convenience.'

"Others of the nobles and their clans were being escorted into the presence of Sar as I was led away, horror-stricken by the all too clear ulterior implication which Sar's words portended. The two warriors took me through a narrow corridor leading from the throne room to the apartments of Xog, where I was locked securely in one of the chambers therein. Then, very loudly for my hearing, the two stood outside the locked door and jestingly hurled lurid insinuations at each other—insinuations relevant to my coming fate at the hands of Sar—a fate, needless to say, which would be far worse than death. However, they finally departed, their hollow laughter ringing

mockingly in my ears as they retraced their steps back through the corridor by which we had come.

"Glancing about, I saw that the room was devoid of furnishings but for a large marble bench on one side, and a smaller stool-like bench carved from cruda stone upon the other. At the room's farther end was a small alcove in which was a pile of sleeping furs, and I hurriedly probed their folds in search of a weapon of sort but found nothing. In total despair I sat down upon the large marble bench and stared dumbly at the opposite wall. As my eyes again perceived the small stool there on the floor, a sudden notion smote my senses. Quickly I crossed the room and seized the little stool, returned and stood over the large bench where I had sat. I raised the stool high overhead and with all my strength dashed it against the thick marble of the larger bench. I repeated this procedure again and again until my efforts were rewarded when the stool broke into a number of pieces. Selecting a stone fragment of about four inches in length by approximately the same dimension in width, I tucked it out of sight beneath the folds of my robe. I then scooped up the remaining pieces and carried them into the alcove, hiding them underneath the pile of furs. Resuming my seat on the marble bench, I waited.

"My wait was of short duration for presently I heard the door being unlocked and Sar entered with the royal sash of Xog draped over his shoulder. Written upon his countenance was an over-exaggerated expression of regal bearing. With an evil smile he advanced toward the marble bench where I sat, his eyes blazing in lust which accentuated his purpose all too clearly. Showing no outward signs of fear or altered emotion other than that of sheer contempt, I arose just as he launched himself upon me in the manner of a wild beast attacking its prey. As he relentlessly forced me back toward the alcove and the pile of furs therein, I slipped my hand beneath my robe, grasping firmly the hiddan piece of stone, withdrawing it, I raised my arm over his shoulder and brought the stone down viciously on the side of his head above the left ear. I sprang back as I felt his grip relax and he sank soundlessly to the floor. Almost immediately, however, I regretted my action as the thought that I may have killed him entered my tortured brain. Xog's life would quickly pay the forfeit had this happened, but a brief inspection allayed my fears as I saw that he was merely stunned.

"I entered the main apartment of Xog, and by another exit, carefully made my way to the outside behind the palace. Luckily no one was about, and I boldly stepped into the street and at a leisurely pace I proceeded towards the outskirts of the village. Once outside the village and out of sight, I commenced running until Hask was left far behind. I knew that Jsk had left on a hunt, and I was contemplating so as to how I could possibly find him when I was beset by this Dueg hare. I managed to elude his attack and once again I was racing for my life—or my honor, probably both. There is nothing more to tell that isn't already known to you."

Looking at Jsk deprecatingly, she asked in desperation: "What possibly can we do?"

CHAPTER VII

"What can we do?" repeated Ula, as silence followed her first query.

"Have you any idea," I asked, "where Xog is being held prisoner?"

She shook her head. "I do not know," she said; "although it is more than likely that he has been cast into the ancient dungeons beneath the palace. I'm sure that Sar is quite competent of such an affront."

"That, then," I said, decisively, "will be the first thing we must do. We must establish the

exact whereabouts of Xog and effect his liberation."

"Yes," agreed Jak. "At present, that would be our only alternative. It would be foolhardy to attempt to undertake the task of wresting Sar from his ill-begotten throne as long as my father's life hangs in the balance. Once Xog is free we can then proceed against Sar."

"It will not be an easy matter to free Xog even should we discover his whereabouts," admonished the skeptical Rek. "Doubtless, the horyth, Sar, is well aware that the power he holds over all Hask depends upon his ability to keep the King a prisoner, and he will make every effort to do so by the deployment of a multitude of guards." "That, also, is true," admitted Jak; "but let us continue on to Haek. I know of a hidden cave not far from the outskirts of the village. We can formulate a definite plan of action from there."

"What is to be done about this fellow?" asked Rek, inclining his head at the Dusg, who was now in a sitting position looking at us dolefully.

"If he is well enough he can go his way," I said. "Killing a man in fair combat is one thing; murdering him is another. Can you walk?" I asked of the beast-man.

The Dusg arose, and a bit unsteadily commenced hobbling in circular path, stopping several times to rub his injured limb vigorously.

"You seem to be capable of surviving," I acknowledged. "Go your way."

Ion and Gof had already lifted the litter of meat and the march toward Haek was again resumed. After traveling a short distance, I turned at an afterthought relative to the injured Dusg's ambulatory progress from where we had left him, and was surprised to see him limping along in our wake not fifty feet behind!

"Why are you following us?" I demanded sharply.

The Dusg hobbled to a stop beside me and to my astonishment he drew his sword and threw it upon the ground at my feet. "O' Mighty One," he cried; "you slew the horyth which would have devoured me, and when your comrades would have delivered the fatal thrust of his blade, you again spared my worthless life by steyng his arm. My sword is yours. Permit Go-gu the Dusg to serve you to the death, or take his blade and run it through his already bleeding heart." He dropped to his knees, baring his hairy chest before me.

Many times, among the civilized nations of Mars, have I been paid homage by the age-old custom of an unbuckled sword and scabbard being thrown at my feet as a token of undying allegiance. Had I been struck dumb, I couldn't have been less speechless than I was at that moment as I witnessed the striking similarity to this ageless Martian custom which the Dusg's action portrayed.

Despite having the knowledge that these hairy beings were wanton killers, I could not help but feel that this fellow kneeling before me was thoroughly altered in perspective by the induce-ment of a heretofore unknown quality called gretitude.

I could not kill the men. Neither had I the heart to turn a cold shoulder to his obviously unimpeachable act of supplication. What harm would there be in allowing this poor creature to join our company? And besides, would not the addition of another reliable sword be a welcome asset to the task before us?

In full view of the others, who were intently watching the little drama being staged before them, I bade the Dusg to rise with a gesture of the hand, and bending over, I picked up his sword and calmly reinserted it in its sheath which depended from a rawhide thong about his waist. A wide grin spread across the beast-man's face, and I said: "I am inclined to believe in your sincerity inasmuch as the wrong you would have done this girl weighs heavily against you, but I will ascribe that to natural instincts rather than malicious intent. Doubtless, in view of what has

been revealed to us, you will have ample opportunity to right the wrong you would have committed. For my part, Go-gu the Dusg, I accept your offer of service, but my resolve in no way obligates the others to do likewise."

If I had expected words of dissent from my companions, I could not have been further from the truth, for the exact opposite prevailed in the expressions of acceptance which met my inquiring glance. Even the impetuous Rek justified my course of action with a nod of approval.

Our trek finally came to an end when, upon entering a small rock-bound gorge, Jak led the way up a short incline and passed from sight into a fissure between two large boulders. The rest of us followed closely, and after a series of turns, we passed into a thicket of tangled brush and emerged at the entrance to a well-defined cavern the interior of which was faintly illuminated by diffused light filtering down from its roof.

"This is the cave I mentioned," said Jak. "I discovered it by chance when I was a boy, and as far as I know, there is no other Haskian now living who is aware of its existence. We shall be quite safe here."

Consuming a meal of sort meat our entire company sought some much needed rest after Jak had ruled out the suggestion of placing a guard at the cave's entrance.

"I'm quite sure," he said, "that none of Sar's men, if anyone, knows of this cave. Even if someone has knowledge of it, there is little likelihood that it will be visited at this particular time. But if it should so befall that this remote possibility occurs, the odds are better than even that the visitor will be friendly. No, a guard will be unnecessary. Let us get some sleep."

I must have slept for a considerable period for when I awoke I felt very much refreshed. The others also were astir, being assembled around a small fire grilling sort meat and in earnest conversation. Go-gu, sitting a little apart from the group, was administering some sort of remedy to his injured leg by dabbing it with what appeared to be a handful of crushed leaves or weeds.

"Where is Haek in relation to this cave?" I asked, as I joined those by the fire.

"You can see the entire village from the top of the gorge," replied Jak. "We have decided that one of us should proceed to Haek for the purpose of determining the whereabouts of Xog's confinement, and also to obtain whatever information which would be of assistance in effecting his rescue. Rek has offered to undertake this venture and he is leaving at once."

I nodded. "Before I slept," I said, "I, myself, had thought of entering Haek. I reasoned that being unknown I would fare much better than any of you, but I failed to calculate the effect my red skin would have on the populace. Such as it is, my presence would quickly become known to Sar and the information we seek may be long forthcoming by unavoidable delays."

Jak smiled. "Your presence would certainly create quite a stir," he declared. "That is beyond question."

"I have many friends within the village," said Rek, "and not being of the nobility, I may, in natural demeanor, mingle among them without being arrested by Sar's men. I shall endeavor to gather the details essential to our purpose and return hence to the cave as quickly as possible."

"You say," said I, turning to Jak, "that you can see Haek from the top of the gorge? I shall accompany Rek as far as there, where I will be able to observe this village of yours. I shall return shortly."

Rek and I arose and passed through the cave's entrance and into the maze of brush. We emerged from the fissure and stood momentarily scanning the rocky wall we must climb to reach the summit of the gorge, when Go-gu the Dusg appeared from behind and approached Rek and I with an eager look of potential invitation written upon his

countenance. I noticed that his limp had lessened to the extent that he walked quite normally with no apparent effort.

Casting a facetious look at Hek, I smiled and nodded approvingly. "Come," I said.

After a somewhat precarious ascent we reached the summit of the gorge and looked out upon a wide expanse of fertile lowland lying between a low range of hills on one side, and upon the other by the rocky mesa where we stood. Through the center of the valley wound a placid river and upon both sides of its banks lay the village of Hek.

Village! Since I was apprised of its being, I had formed a vague mental concept of a small group of rude dwellings palisaded with hewn timber! Here before me lay a well-balanced city of modest dimensions. Two-story buildings of cut stone predominated, being built in sections on a regular plane and bounded by successive parallel streets in each direction and intersecting at right angles. The streets were laid in flagstones as were the road-beds of the several bridges which spanned the river. The supporting beams and framework of these bridges were constructed of heavy timber. Near the center of the city was a rambling four-story structure built entirely of what looked like white limestone and upon each of its corners rose a conical-topped turret each of which was surmounted by a grotesque, open-jawed gargoyle facing outward at an oblique angle from the building's walls. The main entrance to the building was fronted by a spacious patio upon which a number of men strolled back and forth. Two others stood motionless at each side of the portals.

"Xog's palace," explained Hek, as he noticed the direction of my eyes. "I see that the horthy has employed an adequate number of guards at the palace entrance."

Spontaneously, I had counted eight guards in all when there came from the doorway and out upon the patio another group, but the distance was too great to distinguish individual features or sex, but it was not too great to see that some of the group were bound neck to neck one behind the other, and that the balance was herding them out into the courtyard. No super-intellect was required to interpret the all too obvious roles of captives and captors.

"What do you make of that?" I asked of Hek.

"I'm sure I do not know," he replied, "unless—"

We continued to watch the demonstration until the group who had emerged from the palace were assembled in the courtyard, those who were bound being lined in a column and flanked on both sides by the others with one assuming a position at the van. They stood thus for a time as though orders were being issued from he who stood at the front, for we could see his arms waving about as in emphasis to spoken words. Finally, the entire group moved across the courtyard and into an adjacent street where they passed from our line of vision. We caught occasional glimpses of the procession as it passed intersections, and then it turned into another street which allowed us to keep it in view. We saw many other individuals joining the rear of the column, in its progress, which we now saw was to the outskirts of the city at a point almost directly below us. Leaving the city, the procession began ascending the slope at whose summit we stood, but turned on a lateral course along a worn roadway which lay about a half-mile below.

Hek stiffened abruptly with an exclamation. "I was right!" he cried. "I know now, John Carter, what is happening before us. We are witnessing the trek of no return for those poor unfortunate in fetters. Look! Need I speak further?" He extended his arm, traversing slowly the procession's route of progress, which gradually led upward diagonally across our frontage, crossing the mesa at a point some two hundred yards to our left. Some five miles beyond this point rose Roharzen,

the mountain of fire, standing sublime in majestic grandeur, towering far above its neighbors of a lesser nature, and here it was that Hek's arm paused.

Deliberating for a moment upon a sudden whim which smote my brain, I faced Hek resolutely. "Show me the shortest way you know to the mouth of the crater," I commanded. "Possibly my red skin may prove its worth after all—by being the virtual salvation of Hek."

CHAPTER VIII

Whether or not Hek had an inkling of my intentions was not apparent upon his visage, but the peremptory manner of my command spurred him to instant action. Without a word, he set off across the mesa with Go-gu and me following closely at his heels. Reaching the point where the roadway from below crossed the mesa, we bore to the left along the road, down a short declivity and out upon a varitable sea of porous rock, deposited over an enormous area from eruptions of a by-gones. Here, the road upon which we ran lost all symmetry and it was with no little difficulty that we found sure footing as we hastily picked our way across this rugged terrain. I saw that this area extended to the lower slopes of Roharzen, and I later learned that the volcano was entirely circumscribed by this unbroken field of hardened lava.

Eventually, however, we emerged upon the slopes of the great mountain and began the arduous climb to the top. The way led upward, winding and twisting over what once may have been a clear-cut trail that had long since deteriorated to the ravishes of time, but as we neared the summit, narrow chasms, expelling pungently sulfurous vapors, began to break the continuity of the vague trail, compelling us to traverse the remaining distance to the top with unerring discretion lest a slip of the foot precipitate one or all into a fiery tomb in the depths of the volcano. But at last we stood upon Roharzen's peak and, turning, we saw, far below, the slow moving procession about half-way across the lava field advancing toward the lower slopes of the mountain.

"They are using the same general path which we ourselves used," explained Hek, "but when they reach the more hazardous area of the fissures, they will undoubtedly swing off upon another and much safer trail which arrives at the peak on the opposite side of the crater."

The outer periphery of the summit of the volcano lay on a more or less concentric plane, but its contours were disrupted by numerous depressions which converged upon the crater such as the spokes to the hub of a cart-wheel. These depressions were evidently formed by the flow of lava of another age. That the volcano had been dormant for a long period was evidenced by the great amount of erosion visible on the surface of the rock. The mouth of the crater was perhaps three hundred feet in diameter, forming a huge cirole broken by a number of outcroppings of jagged rock.

"Do you know the exact site where the rites will be performed?" I asked of Hek.

He pointed to a broad, flat-topped outcropping jutting over the crater's edge at about a hundred feet away. "There is where the rituals were held from the time of the ancients until the ascension of Rab," he said. "Doubtless, Sar will continue to perform the unholy tradition by committing his atrocities at this same point. What is it that you have in mind, John Carter?"

"I am not quite sure," I replied with a wry smile; "but if Sar is a believer of the divine convictions which he has so malignantly exploited, he shall have the surprise of his life coming to him."

The cursory plan of action laying loosely in my mind was greatly enhanced when, upon glancing

underneath the broad outcropping, I noticed a narrow ledge projecting from the inner wall of the crater and running beneath and on both sides of the jutting crag above. It extended on a horizontal plane some thirty feet below the rim of the crater and at its greatest dimension the ledge was perhaps four feet wide while its smallest width could be measured in inches.

With a nod of satisfaction, I then explained to Rek and Go-gu something of the plan I had in mind, to which Rek beamed in whole-hearted approval.

Soon we heard the subdued sound of voices, and, looking downward, we observed the throng moving on a circuitous route around the side of the mountain, shunting the more precarious, fissure-infested way by which we had arrived at the summit. I then bade my companions to seek concealment on the slopes of the peak, cautioning them to remain hidden until their better judgment allowed them to expose themselves. As I saw them disappear over the outer rim, I again put my earthly muscles to use and leaped over the mouth of the crater, landing lightly upon the ledge at the site of its greatest width, which was almost underneath the overhanging crag above. The sultry fumes which assailed my nostrils were stifling and the heat intolerable but these discomforts were somewhat alleviated after a few moments as I became acclimated to the sudden variation of conditions. Far below was a surging sea of molten lava, flames, leaping one upon another, reached up toward me hungrily and I involuntarily shrank back against the side of the crater putting as much distance possible between myself and this seething inferno of bubbling rock.

After what seemed like an eternity of isolation on the brink of hell, I heard the remote murmur of voices, gradually increasing in volume until I knew that the long-awaited procession was directly overhead. A woman's distressing wail rang out over the general confusion and I waited no longer. Taking a few steps back along the ledge to give myself clearance, I sprang upward and outward over the fiery pit, landing erect on the very lip of the projecting crag above.

As I had beforehand anticipated, my unexpected appearance had a paralyzing effect upon the crowd. They stood in wide-eyed awe and consternation as though suddenly divested of the powers of speech and motion. Stepping forward, I folded my arms across my chest and haughtily scanned the rows of faces before me.

"Which is he?" I asked, "who is called Sar?"

At the sound of my voice, the foremost in the group shrank back shaking as though stricken with palsy and it took no second guess to know that this was the self-styled monarch. Further identification was evidenced in a long, serape-like sack of bright yellow fur which draped over his shoulder depending to the knees.

With this obvious betrayal of identity, I wished I could have recited my question, but I promptly countered by pointing an accusing finger at him.

"You!" I shouted. "Why is it that you did not speak when I asked for you? Do you not know that I am well aware that you are Sar? Step out that I can so address you properly!"

At this apparent display of unprecedented pre-vision, those immediately in the rear of Sar impulsively began pushing him forward and away from them, and as he became separated from the group, I thought that he would collapse, so great was his shaking.

"What—who—who are—you?" he finally managed to gasp.

"None should know better than Sar," I snapped; "or can it be possible that even he doesn't recognize a fire demon when he sees one?"

"Fire—demon?" "Why—yes—certainly I do," he blustered. "I was merely startled by your sudden entry," and regaining a little of his composure, he turned to the assemblage and said in a voice

which wavered noticeably: "Warriors and people of Haek. It seems that we have been honored by the divine presence of a fire demon himself—the presence which is decisive in itself and in direct rebuttal to the flagrant conduct of the defiler Xog and his fathers before him who have, until the present, occupied the throne of Haek. Here before your eyes is the proof necessary to justify the sacred policies of my revered ancestors. Does this not confirm, beyond doubt, that the fire demons exist and were but awaiting Sar to restore the sacraments which are rightfully theirs?"

"Ser speaks spurious words," I said in a loud tone. "I did not appear before this company to sanctify the debased deeds of his ignominious ancestors, but to enlighten you to the fact that we of Roharzen frown in utter contempt of such deeds. We are extremely annoyed at the manner in which you have been duped by this fool here," and I again pointed an accusing finger at the self-styled king.

Ser staggered as the full impact of my words crashed into his brain.

"Then why," he asked, insidiously, "why is it that this fact was never made known to my illustrious forefathers?"

"Ah, but it was," I said. "Contrary to the appearance of a fire demon before them, our anger was evident by another means."

"And what then was that?" demanded Ser, beginning to show signs of obtrusiveness as he realized that he was being forced into the position of a defeatist in the eyes of the entire assemblage.

"Has Roharzen erupted since the ascension of Rab?" I asked, knowing that the extent of erosion upon the mountain's surface gave evidence that the volcano had lain dormant for at least the three generations since that worthy's successful uprising.

"No," cried Ser; "but what has that to do with it?"

"Had Roharzen erupted before the ascension of Rab?" I asked.

He was about to reply, and then abruptly clamped his jaws together and was silent as the light of understanding filtered into his consciousness.

"Had it?" I fairly shouted at him.

"Yes, many times," came from one of the captives in the rear, seeing the ray of hope which the import of my words implied, and realizing that nothing was to be gained by remaining silent. "My grandfather spoke of them," he continued, "and he told of his father and grandfather telling of great eruptions, but their rulers always demanded more offerings to Roharzen, saying that enough wasn't being tendered to pacify the fire demons within."

"Can you not see that we were showing our highest degree of displeasure by these eruptions?" I said; "that it was a sign to cease the malevolent pillage of man's dignity—not to further enhance it."

It was then that Ser went into a veritable frenzy of hatred and frustration as he now realized that his house of cards was collapsing about him. His face took on a look of bestial fury as he literally danced in his rage.

"He lies!" he screamed. "He is an imposter! No true fire demon would profess such sacrilege to the consecrated atonements of the ages. Seize him! Seize the imposter and cast him into the flaming crypt from whence he came!"

"Back!" I shouted, as several of the warriors drew their swords and advanced toward me. "You cannot harm me! Did you not see me emerge from the bowels of Roharzen in the manner befitting a true fire demon? Do you not see my fiery skin? Must I further prove my entity by calling forth the consuming fires to engulf you?"

The warriors hesitated, and one sword slipped from nerveless fingers, clattering to the rocky surface of the outcropping, and as though this

was a presranged signal, the entire company of warriors unsheathed and dropped their swords, drawing back among the captives, cowering in fear.

Sar, futilely screaming at his men to pick up their swords, suddenly lost all vestige of what little sanity he had left. He whipped out his sword and rushed blindly at me in demoniacal rage, sword-point foremost. With a grim smile, I decided to play with him as a cat plays with a mouse and I made no attempt to defend myself. Just as he believed that he was about to run me through, I nimbly leaped upward, spreading my legs as he passed beneath me; but I hadn't reckoned on the hands of fate which unfriendly reached out and brought my little game to an abrupt end.

As I touched the ground after leaping over his head, I whirled, and saw him catch his foot on a small protuberance which served to increase his momentum, and sent him plunging, screaming, over the lip of the crater and down into the depths of the seething holocaust below.

CHAPTER IX

After commanding the cowaring warriors to release the prisoners, I pondered the situation at hand. True, the short-lived reign of Sar had ended. Far better than I had dared hope, my role as a fire demon had consummated its purpose, but with a quite unexpected climax. I had hoped to take Sar for, no better bargaining-persuasive than his own life would have been needed to facilitate the safe release of Xog. Now, further plans would be necessitated to prevent Xog's execution before word of Sar's death reached the ears of his jailors. This I discussed with Rek, who, accompanied by Go-gu, had come up from his hiding place just as Sar went hurtling to his death, and the already amazed features of the crowd were further augmented upon seeing a Haekian in social contact with a fierce Doug.

From Sar's warriors we learned that Xog was indeed being held in the dungeons beneath the palace, and that his guards were under strict obligation to slay him immediately upon the order of any of Sar's lieutenants.

Sar's warriors then humbly begged us to allow them to reenter Xog's service, swearing undying loyalty and saying that they, as well as most of Sar's men, had been pressed into the rebellion through fear of their lives rather than being true supporters of Sar's causa—only a few overzealous subordinates who had been promised high governmental positions being genuine collaborators of the ill-fated fanatic.

"But," said one, "when the true purport of Roharszen's fire demons becomes known, then surely these traitors will see the error of their ways and let the fate of Sar befall them also."

"I think," said I, "that it would be better if we refrained from spreading the word of Sar's death until Xog is released from confinement. It would be my guess that Sar has employed as guards only those in whom he has unquestionable trust—but wait!" I cried suddenly, "I believe I have it! We will proceed to the cave where Jak and the others await. There, these people and those who were to be committed to Roharzen will remain, while we and the others of our group are taken into Haek supposedly the prisoners of these warriors here. They will then take us directly to the dungeons under the pretext of imprisoning us, and once we are there, we can overcome the guards and free Xog."

"It is a good plan," admitted Rek, "but will not suspicion be aroused if we are escorted to the dungeons in possession of our weapons?"

"I have thought of that also," I replied. "We shall relinquish them to these warriors who will thereupon return them to us when they are needed."

"That is well and good," said Haek; "but even though they have all sworn allegiance, how can we be sure that there will be no treachery upon

the part of but one of them?"

I shot a reproachful look at the company of warriors. "For the simple reason," I said, "that upon the first sign of treachery, I will thence turn the traitor into a living pillar of fire."

If it occurred to them why I didn't propose doing likewise to Xog's guards and thus eliminate the need for all the stratagem and stealth, it wasn't apparent upon their countenances, but the expressions of awe and solicitude which did appear gave me confidence that all could be relied upon to support me to the limit.

Instructing the warriors to retrieve their fallen swords, we began the return journey to the cave and in due time we were met at the entrance by Jak and the others, to whom I briefly related the events which had transpired since Rek, Go-gu and I had left, concluding with an outline of the plan for Xog's rescue in accordance with the change in demeanor of the accompanying warriors.

"I'm sure," said Jak, addressing the warriors, "that the part you are about to assume will not go unrewarded."

It was decided that Ula should remain in the cave with the others, Jak informing them that, immediately upon the outcome of my plan, he would send a messenger to acquaint them with the facts whether they be good or bad. My four Haekian friends, Go-gu and I then unsheathed our swords, handing them to Sar's erstwhile warriors who inserted them behind their rawhide belts at the opposite side from where their own swords depended, and the march to Haek was begun.

For the most part, after entering the city, our seeming capture was treated with pathetic stares from the populace as they saw their king's son and his fellows being escorted to the palace under guard, but for as many stares of compassion that there were for the four Haekians, an equal amount of expressions of amazement and wonder were given at the sight of Go-gu and me.

We reached the palace grounds without incident and were promptly accosted by the guards as we mounted the steps to the patio. Theirs, too, were stares of wonder as they saw the mixed company.

"Where is Sar?" demanded he who was in charge.

"Sar stopped across the courtyard at the home of the noble, Jud," spoke one of our warriors. "We captured the wench who assaulted him and he has taken her there to teach her some manners before bringing her to the palace," and he cast a sly wink at those on the patio. "Doubtless," he added, "Sar will conduct his session in etiquette in a chamber that is free of small benches." "Doubtless," laughed the guard; "but where in all Haek did you find this motley group?" and he indicated my companions and me with a jerk of his thumb.

"We encountered and captured them on the slopes overlooking Haek," said our warrior glibly. "Sar instructed us to take them to the dungeons immediately."

"Pass, then," said the guard, but as we moved toward the palace entrance he suddenly shouted: "Wait! Why is it that these three are to be imprisoned? They are not of the nobility." He pointed to Lon, Gof and Rek.

"Ask Sar," answered our spokesman. "He told us to let them all."

Apparently satisfied, the guard waved us on and we passed through the portals and into the palace. Immediately we turned to the left along a corridor at the end of which was a narrow stone stairway that took us downward in a circular fashion, our descent being illuminated by bright flames which flickered upward from small cressets fixed upon the walls at various intervals. After a countless number of steps, we came to the foot of the stairway which entered into a long, dark corridor on both sides of which were narrow doors, each being equipped with a heavy wooden bar by which it was locked. These doors were interspersed evenly for the corridor's entire length, and more

than likely, they housed the deposed nobility of Haak who had been condemned by Sar.

Raising his arm as a signal to halt, the warrior who had proved himself to be an excellent spokesman turned and procured our swords from the six warriors who carried them.

"You had better take these now," he said. "It may not be as easy to deceive the guards ahead as it was at the palace entrance, and it may be that we will need every available sword at any moment."

"Directly to the right of the end of this corridor," he continued, "is a short passageway which leads to the guarded doorway of a chamber literally filled with Sar's trusted men. This chamber is the guard-room to an adjacent cell in which the king is confined. The warrior guarding the passageway must be silenced, and upon entering the chamber, the best swordsman among us must immediately gain access to, and station himself at the door of Xog's cell lest, while we are all engaged, the king is set upon and killed. Come. Let us proceed in absolute silence."

Noislessly, we traversed the length of the corridor and as we neared its end, I pressed forward into the lead and cautiously peered around the corner where I saw a lone warrior standing near a closed door at the end of the passageway some fifty feet off. He was leaning on the wall near the portal and facing in our direction, staring into space.

For what seemed like an interminable period of time he stood thus, and as I began to chafe with impatience, he finally straightened and commenced to walk slowly down the passageway toward where we lay in wait. Firmly grasping the hilt of my sword, I gestured the others to caution, and awaited his coming; but, to my chagrin, he turned when he was half-way to us and slowly walked back the way he had come. However, when he reached the doorway he swung about and again proceeded toward us, as before, he turned when he was half-way between us and the doorway, but as he did so, I stepped quickly into the passageway and with one bound I landed lightly behind him and pressed the point of my sword against the back of his neck. "Make no outcry," I hissed in his ear. "One sound and you die."

Marching him back to my companions, I instructed them to place the fellow in one of the numerous cells in the corridor. "One of you remain with him until we have entered the guard-room," I directed; "but when you hear the sound of conflict, lock him therein and hasten to our aid."

This accomplished, I led my man down the passageway until we stood at the closed door, but upon applying pressure to it, I found that it was barred from the inside. Pondering for a moment, I then covered my mouth lightly with the palm of my hand to muffle my voice and boldly knocked upon the door.

"Open the door," I said in a distorted tone. "The strap which supports my sheath and loincloth has broken. I would borrow another until I am relieved of duty."

Some subdued laughter came from inside, to be immediately followed by the sound of someone approaching the door.

"Can you not mend it temporarily by tying the ends together?" called a voice.

"No," I answered, in the same muffled tone. "I have already tried that but the ends are too short. Open up, or must I finish my tour of duty in sheer nakedness?"

Almost at once we heard the bar being lifted and the door swung open. I sprang inward, dealing the fellow who had opened the door a terrific blow to the jaw, and a hurried glance revealed some twenty warriors seated around a long table, being occupied in some worthless pastime of which I was ignorant. On the opposite side of the room was a barred door and I leaped nimbly over the table and turned, facing the guard-room with this door at my back. Instantly the room

became a bedlam of howling, cursing warriors.

As our foes became cognizant of our fewer number, which was fourteen including our man who had now arrived from the cell in the corridor, each engaged an opponent, while the remaining seven converged upon the doorway where I stood. I assumed my famed fighting smile characteristic of the odds against me, and never before had my blade flashed so furiously as it did then.

I had despatched four of my adversaries, and the other three, realizing that they were facing inevitable defeat at the hands of a past master of the sword, suddenly, at a word from me, thrust all three blades at me simultaneously. I managed to parry the three swords but in doing so, I took a quick side-step and tripped over the outstretched arm of one of my victims. I fell heavily to the floor, my blade spinning from my grasp, and looked up at the leering faces and brandished swords of my executioners. Before they could deliver the COUP DE GRACE, I was aware of a veritable fury of flying fur and saw my opponents bowed over like ten-pins, crashing headlong into the wall with an impressive, skull-splitting thud. Emerging from the entangled heap of bodies, andazing my astonished eyes, was the grinning features of Go-gu the Duag.

Casting him a quick smile of appreciation, I surrendered my sword only to see our surviving foes surrendering themselves to my comrades. Our losses were three men to our opponents' twelve.

Unbarring the door which I had successfully defended, I threw it open and aaw, standing beyond the threshold, a man of medium stature and of stately carriage—Xog, King of Haak.

"Father!" cried Jak, springing forward and embracing the king.

"What means this?" asked Xog, obviously bewildered. "I heard the sound of battle, but—what—who is this person?" His eyes were directed at me.

"It means," cried Jak, jubilantly, "that Haak is forever cleansed of the vile stains of pollution in which it has floundered, for Sar is dead! And this," he went on, turning to me, "is the man of another world who, through his remarkable and unselfish efforts, has turned the sting of defeat into the glory of victory. Xog, King of the World, I present to you, John Carter, Warlord of Mars and Savior of Haak."

Somewhat mortified, I returned the monarch's bow of acknowledgement; and Jak, after sending a messenger ahead to proclaim the good tidings, removed his belt and scabbard and fastened them around the waist of Xog. He then requested that I assume a position of escort upon the king's right, while he took a similar position upon his left.

Proceeding thus, and followed by Go-gu and the warriors herding their prisoners, we ascended in triumph to the palace above.

CHAPTER X

When the word became known of Sar's death and of the restoration of Xog to the throne of Haak, there was much cause for celebration. Runners were despatched to the lesser villages of the realm to proclaim a period of great festival. In Xog's palace, a stately banquet was given in my honor in which I was seated at the head of a massive table and flanked on both sides by the nobles of Haak. Even Xog took an inferior seat by placing himself at the foot of the table.

How long the revelry throughout the land lasted, I had no way of knowing. It may have been hours or it may have been days, for time as we know it, does not exist upon this huge world of perpetual light. Eventually, however, the city gradually resumed its former status as the thriving seat of Xog's government and I found myself with a great deal of time in which to pursue a detailed inspection of the city. By this time, my true origin had become known to all, but the awe-some

stares which were cast in my direction by many of those who had witnessed the episode on Ho-harzen's peak, left me with the impression that I would be forever emblazoned in their minds as nothing short of deity.

I found the city of Haak to be much like any of the cities of the great nations of Mars with the possible exception of the medium of exchange; while most of the modern cities of Mars have legal tender in one form or another, here in Haak, one's worth is designated by the value placed upon his product or service. If one wished to purchase the services or products of another, it would be paid for by rendering an equal amount of other tender, subject to agreement by both parties. The government exacted a levy in accordance with one's worth, this sum contributing to the support of the King and his retinue, and from which the soldiery was paid. Of course, there are Martian communities I have seen which also employ this system of expenditure, but it served to illustrate the practical similarity of human nature regardless of where in God's vast domain it evolves.

Much of my time was spent participating in hunting expeditions in the company of Jek, Rek, and others with whom I became acquainted. This not only provided me with the pleasure and thrill of the hunt, but it also permitted me to explore the vicinity of the great barrier cliffs whenever the chase took us into close proximity with them. Ever and uppermost in mind was my finding of a way of access to the world beyond; and heedless of the Haakians' admonitions that there was no break in the smooth walls which would offer a possible means by which to scale the cliffs, I doggedly examined every mile, every foot and inch of that part of the great barrier which I chanced to be near.

Soon, very little of my time was spent in the city. Between hunts, I would generally set out alone to some distant extremity of the land which I had not yet covered. Sometimes Go-gu or Jek or Rek accompanied me on these excursions but, as always, it was with the same depressing result. Not even the slightest rift broke the uniform fastnesses in which the mountains were formed.

On one such expedition, and accompanied by Jek, my quest led us along the base of the great mountain abutment which bordered The Valley of Spouting Waters, and again I stood in awe at the spectacle of the geysers shooting their waters far upward.

"It would be a quick solution to your problem, John Carter," said Jek, with a whimsical smile, "if your remarkable powers permitted you to tread the intangibility of the great cloud envelope above. Then, all that would be necessary would be for you to cast yourself into The Great Fountain and be projected aloft where you could walk the short distance to the mountain-top. But I'm afraid that you would either drown or be scalped to death in the attempt," and he chuckled at the droll humor which his words induced.

For some time Jek's words of casual witticism rank repeatedly in my mind. I glanced at the wide orifice from where The Great Fountain emanated, and then slowly visioned its imaginary course far up into the clouds. A quick look at the abutment stretching parallel to this course with a scant seventy-five yards of space between, and the solution to the disappearing waters of The Great Fountain lay before me in conspicuous simplicity.

"You have unwittingly given me the answer, my friend," I said, exultantly. "As impossible as it may seem, your remark has provided me with a material explanation as to why the waters of The Great Fountain refuse to fall after being cast aloft. Also, it has given me the means by which I may gain access to the outside world beyond the cliffs."

Jek drew back as if I were quite mad. "Do you mean to say," he cried, "that you would literally

cast yourself into The Great Fountain? My remark was but a jest! Tell me, John Carter, tell me that you also are but jesting!"

"It is no jest, my friend," I said. "Would you think me mad if I told you that, contrary to your belief that it is absorbed in the clouds, The Great Fountain projects its waters somewhere over the crest of this mountain abutment? That somewhere above the lower extremity of the cloud envelope this great stream must change its trajectory to deposit its waters in the world beyond? True, it would be unthinkable to cast myself into the stream; but not unthinkable in which to cast a water-proof container large enough to carry me within it."

Jek scoffed at the idea of attempting such an impossible scheme and commenced to flay me with the dire presentiments in which a venture as this could only result. But as I became more convinced in my own convictions concerning The Great Fountain and its vanishing stream, the more I became incensed with desire to carry out my rash and hastily conceived plan.

Briefly, what I had in mind was a hollow sphere, large enough to accommodate my person, and after entering it, have it placed over the orifice of The Great Fountain; the geyser itself doing the rest. If you have ever seen the small white ball riding on the crest of the miniature geyser in a shooting gallery, it will serve to illustrate the maneuver by which I hoped to depart from the land of Haak.

Hurriedly returning to Haak, I made my plans known to Kog, and after he became convinced that I was very much in earnest and not afflicted with the malady of madness, he put the resources of Haak at my command. I employed several of the city's most proficient craftsmen in the art of building and construction, and enlisted the services of a number of unskilled laborers, all of whom accompanied me back to The Valley of Spouting Waters, and the building of the sphere was begun. I directed the laborers to commence the construction of a huge, litter-like platform large enough to span the orifice of The Great Fountain and upon which the sphere would be placed.

In due time the work was completed and I stood looking at the contrivance which would prove to be either my salvation or my tomb. It was constructed of a double layer of staves cut from the hardest known wood in Haak, the inner layer being padded with a heavy lining of soft hide and coated with an asbestos-like mineral which the smelters used in pursuit of their profession. Fastened to the inner wall were two thick rawhide belts with which to strap me securely in place. The outer layer was coated with a gummy, black substance which had the water-proof qualities of pitch; and finally, the sphere was equipped with a small, compact door on a large hinge which, when closed, would preclude the possibility of water seepage. The sphere was ten feet in diameter, allowing ample space for the amount of air I'd need for the short duration of my flight.

The sphere was rolled onto the giant platform and placed firmly in its center and then braced with small wooden props. Kog and his entire court had made the journey from Haak to see me off, as did Jek, Rek and Go-gu the Duug. Also present was a great host of the populace of Haak. Entering the sphere, I strapped myself securely in place and gestured to Jek, who had thrust his head through the doorway, that everything was satisfactory. Without a word, he closed the small door and presently I was cognizant of being lifted by many warriors, and when all became motionless, I knew that the giant litter was in place, spanning the orifice, and I commenced a period of waiting.

Anxiety served to prolong this seemingly interminable wait, and with each vibrating rumble of the constantly erupting lesser geysers, I rigidly braced myself, thinking each to be the one which would send me skyward. Finally, when

one such rumble increased in intensity threatening to burst my ear-drums, I knew the time had come and that this was it.

Suddenly, there came a sharp jerk and I felt as if I'd been flattened by a steam roller. I heard a great crashing upon the outside wall of the sphere as the giant litter was rent asunder, and I lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XI

Once, during a visit to Earth, I had wondered what the man in the barrel had thought as he was about to be precipitated over the falls at Niagara. Had he pessimistically anticipated the worse to happen? Or had he entered the barrel in complete confidence that he would successfully navigate the raging waters? Whatever the case, he undoubtedly was of strong heart and dauntless courage, but it certainly would be open to question if he would so much as consider attempting anything in the nature of what I was now undergoing.

The sensation of a gentle rocking motion accompanied my slow return to consciousness, and as my faculties reverted to normalcy I realized that I was gasping for breath and suddenly became aware that the air within the sphere was all but exhausted. Hastily unfastening the safety belts, I lunged for the door and threw it open, admitting the life-giving air. Sucking in great lungfuls, I saw that the sphere was bobbing upon the surface of a large lake and, except for the faint lapping of the water upon its sides, not a sound broke the silence of my surroundings. The nearest shoreline was perhaps a thousand feet off and without further regard I dived into the lake and set out for it with clean, powerful strokes.

I swam toward a short stretch of sandy beach which was almost directly in line with the course I had first taken, and presently I felt solid ground beneath my feet and I waded the remaining distance to shore. I sat down upon the soft sand and looked about. Completely encircling the lake was a series of rugged mountain peaks, but to the left from where I sat, I saw that the range was much higher in elevation and that its peaks were hidden in the clouds which couldn't have been much more than a mile overhead. I also noticed that a great furrow dented the surface of the mountain-side like a giant sluice and it led downward from the clouded regions to the lake below. Without doubt, this was a channel formed by countless eruptions of The Great Fountain in Hask, and as if in supplement to my thoughts, there suddenly came a great rush of water, spilling down the furrow and flowing into the lake. The Great Fountain had again erupted! Somewhere in the fastness of the clouds the geyser deviated from the perpendicular toward the abutment, spilling over its peak to become the inlet of this mountain lake. As I continued to watch, the rushing waters swiftly subsided and the channel was empty again.

As I had not the slightest idea as to where I was, or how far the great storm had carried me from Kor Zen's village, I decided that one direction would be as good as any, so I arose and struck out along the lake shore in the direction opposite from where the channel lay which carried the waters of The Great Fountain down into the lake. Reaching the lower slopes of the mountain range, I began a slow ascent and soon topped the crest where I looked out upon a far-reaching panorama below, which was expounded greatly by the height of the mountain peak where I stood. Before me lay a vast ocean of desolate wasteland. Not even a tree seemed to break the solidity of the terrain, but I knew that the high altitude from where I observed, bailed much of the detail in the area's substance. I slack noted that the entire descent, while far and long, was on a more or less gradual plane and as I started downward I found progress to be far from difficult. After what must have been hours, I reached the

lower regions and struck out across the vast desert, which I now saw was studded with numerous shrubs and stunted trees of many shapes and varieties.

My survival depended upon my coming into contact with a settlement of Savors or any other form of human or near-human life and by whom, I hoped, could direct me to the village of Kor Zen. But as I covered mile after mile, not a sign was evident to enlighten my senses to the fact that a human had ever trod the ground upon which I was walking.

Hunger became a serious problem as nothing that grew was of an edible nature. However, I did not suffer from thirst for I had discovered that the fruit of a certain type of shrub, while having no food value, was literally filled with a tasteless liquid having all the thirst-quenching qualities of water. I had seen food in the form of several species of small animals but it was impossible to stalk the wily creatures with a sword or a dagger. Consequently, I made a rude bow from a branch of one of the many scrub trees, stringing it with a tough fiber from a low-lying patch of creeper-like shrubbery, and with one of the several arrows I had fashioned, I made my first kill, cooking it over a small fire made by the simple method of friction.

Onward I plodded, ever hoping that by surmounting each succeeding hill, it would reveal a village or a sign of habitation, but the further I went, the more desolate the surrounding territory became. Finally, not a sign of game rewarded my endeavors, and then, vegetation in all its forms disappeared from the landscape, depriving me of the water-filled fruit which I had hitherto found in abundance. Soon, I began to suffer intolerably from lack of moisture and I found myself driving onward more by sheer determination than by physical capability. Stepping and stumbling, I refused to succumb to the relentless elements of nature, literally crawling forward when ultimately found that I could not regain my feet. Then, even crawling was beyond my efforts and I lay quite still hardly knowing if I were dead or alive.

Suddenly, an unwavering drone which steadily increased in volume, broke the stillness of my surroundings and, turning my eyes, I saw a Morgor ship cruising low over the terrain and approaching the direction in which I lay. As it drew near, I feebly waved my arm in hope that its occupants would see me, and as it passed overhead I saw it swing about and circle for a landing. It came to rest fifty feet away and, with a herculean effort, I crawled toward it. The door flung open and leaping from its interior was the figure of Vorion, the Morgor whom I had befriended and who had piloted the ship in which Dejeh Thoris and the others had escaped.

My heart leaped convulsively. I was saved! I had overcome insufferable privations which had threatened to leave my bleached bones lying forever in an unknown desert on a vast, unexplored world. Shortly, I would be reunited with my incomparable mate and, as it has always been my wont, all would soon be well again.

The End

JOHN CARTER

Returns Again In

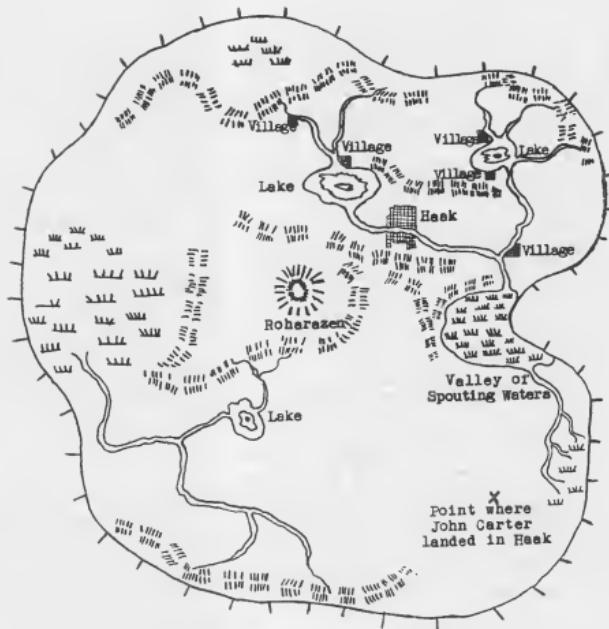
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